

EMBODIMENT

BY

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Submitted to the graduate program in Fine Art,
and to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Chairperson

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Date defended: _____

The Thesis Committee for Betsy Jo Timmer certifies
That this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Date approved: _____

Contemporary art often functions as a powerful lens that examines and scrutinizes the culture from which it is created. As I have become increasingly conscious of the connections between culture, myself, and my studio practice, I recognize that I am provoked by the stress, busyness and endless demands of the non-stop, bigger, better, faster culture of excess in which I find myself daily—specifically the demands facing women. My work is a reaction to women, myself included, struggling to fill many challenging roles simultaneously. Women are expected to be beautiful objects, caring mothers, supportive wives, diligent homemakers, and productive members of the workforce. I wonder if striving to fulfill all of these expectations is realistic. *Are all of these obligations necessary? Who is making these demands? Can women choose one role over another without sacrificing an essential part of themselves?* My work is fueled by observation of our endless ‘to-do’ lists, overflowing inboxes, seventy hour work weeks, miracle diets, cosmetic surgery, and the looming feeling that there is not enough time. I investigate the physical and mental manifestations of our frenzied pace such as anxiety attacks, negative self-image, and crumbling relationships. With each piece I create, I draw attention to and interrogate the demanding culture in which we live.

My work consists of mixed media pieces fashioned from felt, cloth, and found objects—especially domestic tools used by women in Western culture. I employ these materials specifically because they are ordinary, familiar, and feminine. Most of us have an understanding of brooms and scrub brushes; we recognize the sound of bristles moving back and forth. Similarly, most of us have an intimate connection

with textiles. We regularly interact with clothing, bed sheets, and towels; we have experience with wrinkles, rips, and stains. These common, recognizable materials facilitate an immediate relationship between my work and the viewer. I am also instinctively drawn to these materials because they are part of my personal history. The women in my family sew, quilt, and make all manner of crafts. They also spend countless hours cooking, cleaning, and managing their households. I have inherited a strong attachment to these skills and duties. Beyond this familial connection, however, I recognize that another layer of meaning is associated with my chosen media. By using historically feminine materials and techniques to discuss the roles of women in culture, I join a rich tradition of feminist artists working to voice female concerns; artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Jana Sterbak, and Annette Messager have created a context for my current research.

By manipulating fabric, felt, and domestic tools, I create characters with which the viewer can identify. These beings reference parts of the female form—breasts, legs, genitals—the parts particularly valued by our culture. I omit heads and faces to establish anonymity and universality. Expressionless bodies speak of collective concerns rather than personal problems. I eliminate arms to emphasize the inability of the characters to control their situations. Most legs are overly long and thin; they end as abrupt footless stubs or as narrow points. These legs make each entity appear to be precariously balanced and helpless. Because I reference the human form, the characters seem vaguely familiar and understandable. When they are placed in uncomfortable or compromising positions, it is easy to imagine one's own body in

the same position. Even in situations where the figure is not present, the relationship to the body is still essential. For instance, in *Everyday Dress*, the body is absent but the space for the body remains (Image 21). The viewer is left to insert his or her own figure into the dress, to take on the cumbersome burden him or herself.

I use carefully shaped handmade wool felt to make convincing, identifiable forms. Felt can be manipulated intuitively, in much the same way as modeling clay. I add and remove parts and change shapes drastically without having to create unwanted seams or draft complicated patterns. The felt forms feel alive and strangely human to me. They seem to be real bodies with weight and substance. To intensify the lifelike nature of each character, I pay particular attention to gesture and the potential for movement. Each figure seems frozen in space, as if time has been momentarily suspended. Bodies twist awkwardly, about to lose their balance and tumble to the floor. In *Exposed*, the female figure has dropped her skirt and it lies in a rumpled heap around her ankles (Images 14 & 15). These paused actions insinuate a temporary interruption of movement. The viewer is left to imagine how the situation will continue to unfold when he or she turns away.

To further entice the viewer, I employ a subtle sense of humor. My characters are odd. Many have strange, lumpy bodies and domestic tools in place of heads. They look funny and are set in amusing situations. Although initially the tone seems quite humorous, upon closer investigation humor gives way to more serious consideration. The humanlike, female characters are exposed and abused. Their limbs are missing or extremely deformed and disabled. Many struggle to sweep and scrub with their

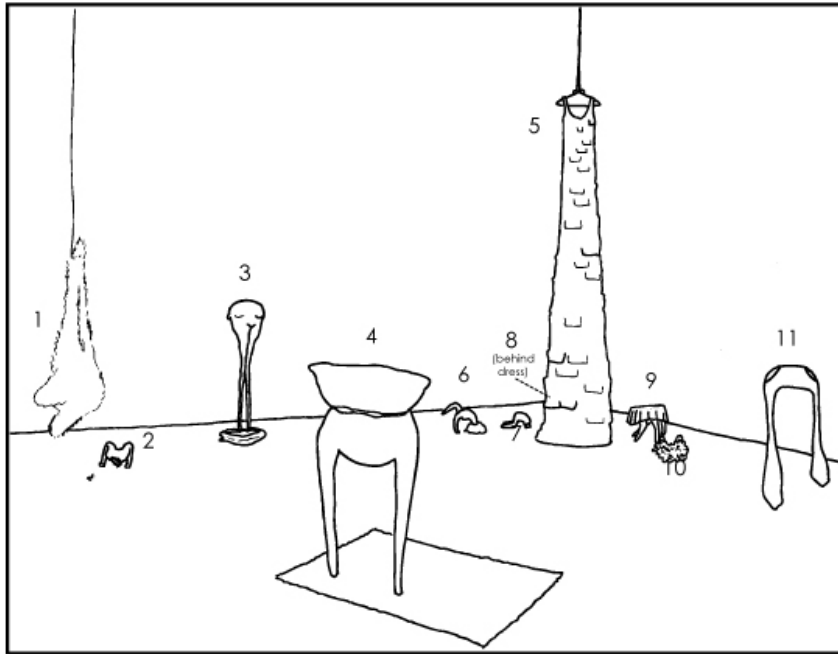
“heads”, bodies dirty and contorted. *How did they arrive at their present positions?*

Do they have to toil in this way? Do they have the ability to change their situations?

Figures stand naked and awkward. They seem embarrassed, self-conscious, and humiliated. I feel awkward and uncomfortable too, when I encounter them. I want the viewer to experience these feelings as well. Just as someone may choose to start a tense conversation by making a joke, I use humor to make difficult content more approachable.

By combining carefully chosen materials to reference the human form and employing humor and gesture, I create characters with which both the audience and I can identify. In endless pursuit of unrealistic goals, women run themselves ragged, hate their bodies, abuse themselves, and feel like failures. As a result of my investigations, I now have a clearer understanding of my own expectations and subsequent emotions—often a confusing mix of pride, joy, frustration, embarrassment, and anger. I continue to be concerned with the tremendous pressures and demands placed on women, both by others and by themselves. Whereas once I felt apprehensive and self-conscious about addressing these issues, now I am empowered. Embodiment gives concrete form to these concerns. I create characters that serve as catalysts, ideally sparking a thorough examination and evaluation of our culture, its demands, and ourselves.

Exhibition Guide



1. *Meat* - turkey feathers, ribbon, cloth
2. *Scrubber* - wool felt, scrub brush
3. *Exposed* - wool felt, found clothing
4. *Bare* - wool felt, found rug
5. *Everyday Dress* - cloth, steel, rope
6. *Duster* - wool felt, found feather duster
7. *Kneeling Sweeper* - wool felt, found brush
8. *Standing Sweeper* - wool felt, found broom
9. *Table Legs* - cloth, wool felt, wood
10. *Mop* - fabric, leather, found mops
11. *Pressing On* - fabric, found irons

Images



Image 1: Installation View



Image 2: Installation View



Image 3: Installation View



Image 4: *Bare*



Image 5: *Bare* (Detail)



Image 6: *Bare* (Detail)



Image 7: *Bare* (Detail)



Image 8: Installation View



Image 9: *Meat & Scrubber*



Image 10: *Meat* (Detail)



Image 11: *Meat* (Detail)



Image 12: *Meat* (Detail)



Image 13: *Scrubber*



Image 14: *Exposed*



Image 15: *Exposed* (Detail)



Image 16: *Exposed* (Detail)



Image 17: *Exposed* (Detail)



Image 18: *Pressing On*



Image 19: *Pressing On* (Detail)

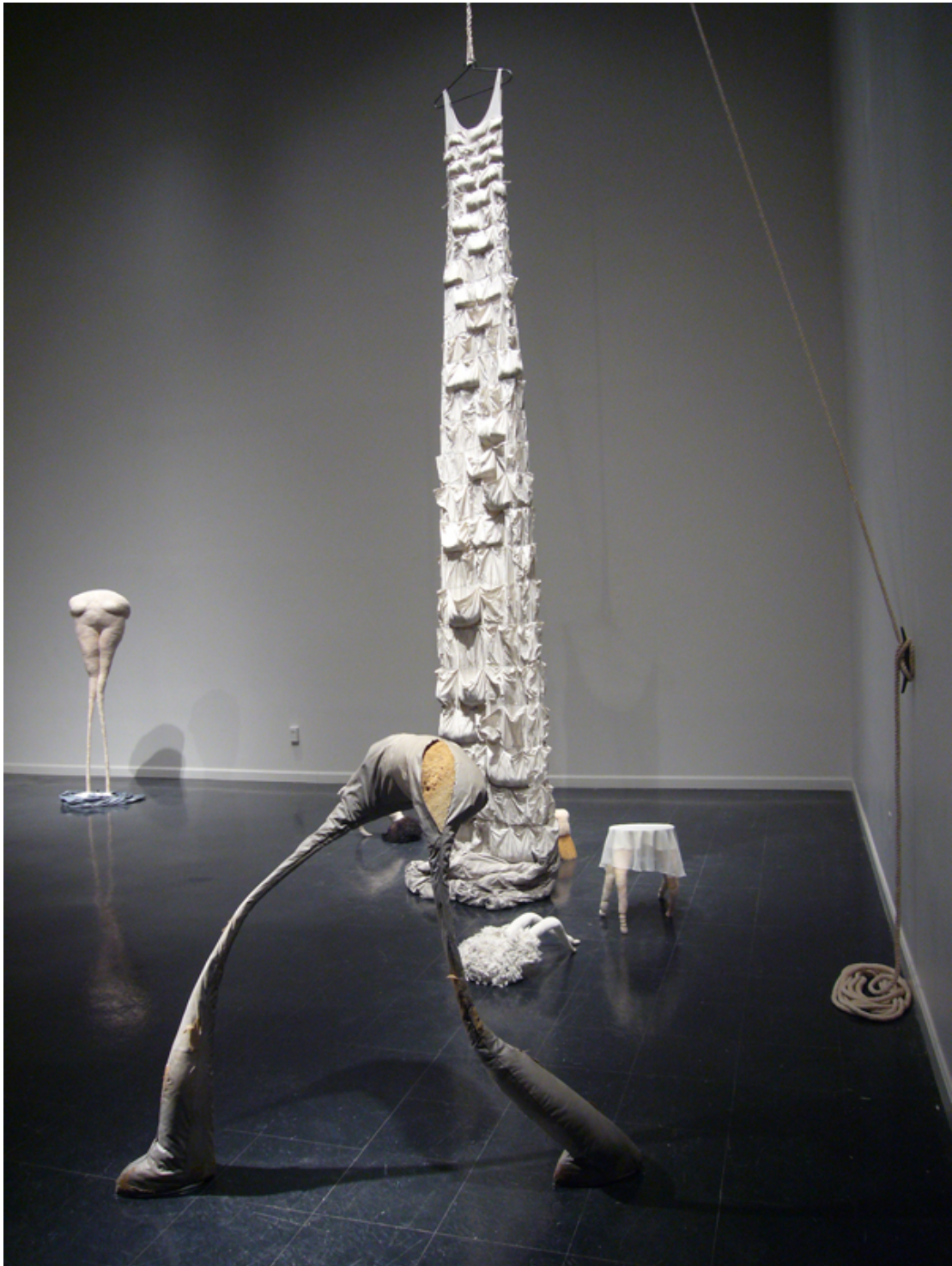


Image 20: *Pressing On* (Detail)

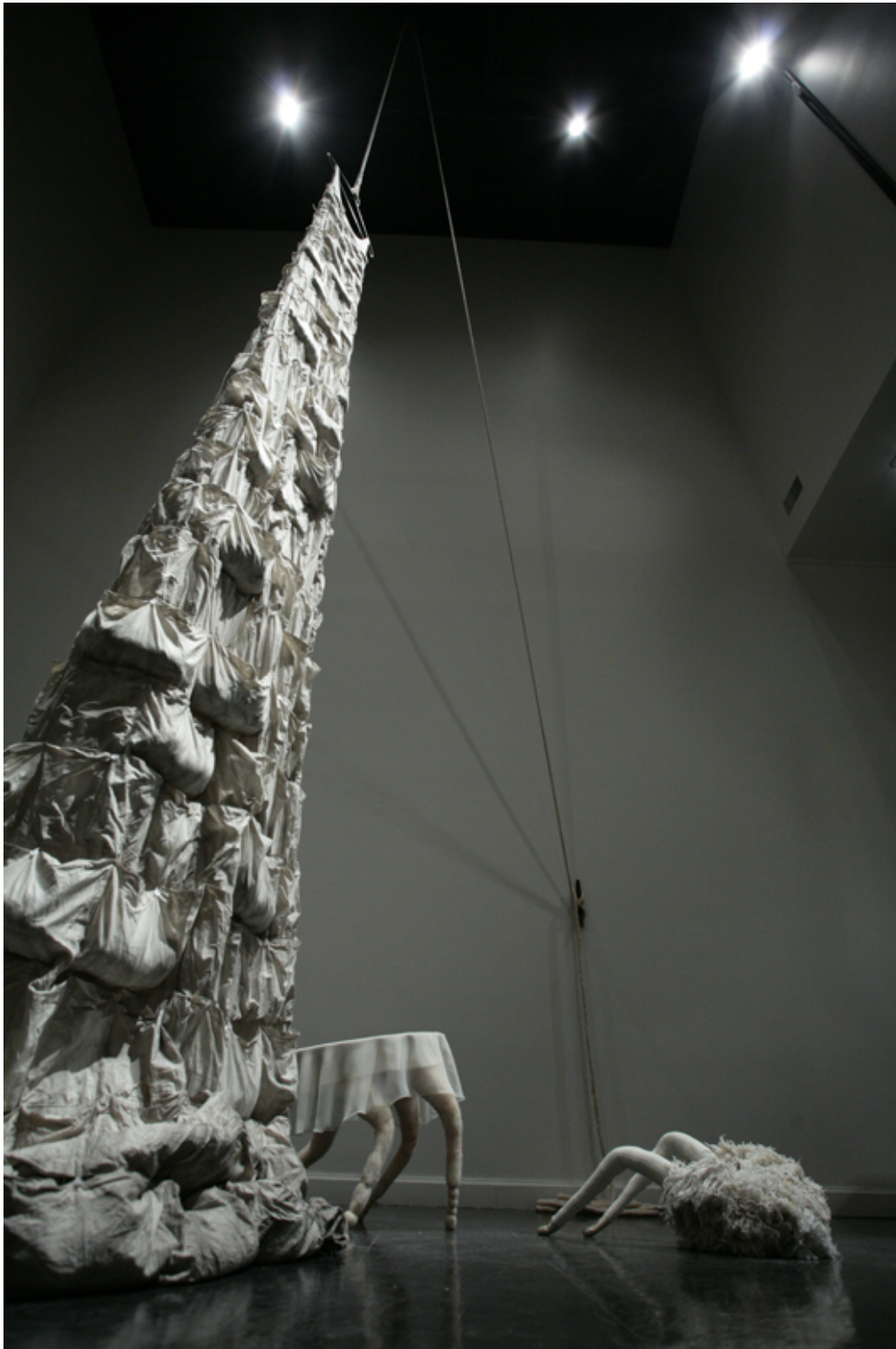


Image 21: *Everyday Dress, Table Legs, and Mop*



Image 22: *Everyday Dress* (Detail)



Image 23: *Mop*



Image 24: *Table Legs*



Image 25: *Duster, Kneeling Sweeper, and Sweeper*



Image 26: *Sweeper and Kneeling Sweeper*



Image 27: *Kneeling Sweeper*



Image 28: *Kneeling Sweeper and Sweeper*